Castlemaine Naturalist

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Dusky Woodswallow Photo Noel Young

The Bush Lives On - Denis Hurley

My bush block, 3 km from Castlemaine GPO, has been very quiet over the last few months. I have been missing my "feathered friends", as I call them. My two bird baths, deep in the understorey of my garden, have had few visitors apart from Crimson Rosellas, some Brown headed Honeyeaters and Pardalotes. Oh, and the Galahs who are nowhere to be seen when I put seed into the feeder, but within microseconds are helping themselves.

A couple of weeks ago, while tidying my workshop, I suddenly realized there was a lot of small-bird noise coming from the understorey. I went out quietly, stood behind the car, and watched. Wow! There were Speckled Warblers, bossy White-naped Honeyeaters, Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Red-browed Finches, an Eastern Spinebill and a lone New Holland Honeyeater. This is the first year I have ever seen Warblers in my garden, and after a couple of visits, they started to use the bird baths. I guess they are the autumn pool-side set, as the Correas have come back into winter flowering mode. This in-crowd outshone the normal run-of-the-mill bunch of Crimson Rosellas, Magpies, Bronzewing Pigeons and Red-lobed Wattlebirds which have tended to dominate the airspace. Soon after the first noisy group had left, their places were taken by a pair of White-eared Honeyeaters and a group of eight or nine Striated Thornbills.

It was a great feeling to see such a large variety of my little feathered friends returning to this spot after such a long, dry spell. It was interesting to watch the pecking order in operation, particularly between the Brown-headed and White-naped Honeyeaters. The White-naped Honeyeaters seemed to harass the Brown-headed Honeyeaters and Warblers, although the Warblers offered little resistance and were quick to get away. More recently, I have also had the company of a medium sized, undamaged-quilled Echidna, which took great delight in cleaning up some of the Argentine ant nests close to my house. And, lo and behold, next evening a BIG, black, battered Echidna, with lots of broken quills, dived into the ground as I came near with my wood barrow. He did not move for 2 hours, compared to the younger one the day before which had been up and feeding unconcernedly. Guess this big, old fella got to be big and old by being very careful.

Excursion to Maryborough - Natalie de Maccus

On Saturday 12th April a small but enthusiastic group of Field Nats set out from the "Octopus" bound for our liaison with Garry Cheers at Maryborough station. The station is a beautiful old building and worthy of an excursion of its own, especially as no trains pass through there any longer.

Garry took us to Paddy's Ranges State Park, a short drive beyond Maryborough. The first place we stopped was not far in from the main road. The area had been extensively mined. At first it seemed as though we would not find any plants flowering. However as we proceeded with eyes glued to the ground we began to make discoveries. Our list included *Leucopogon virgatus* Common Beard-heath, *Corunastylis sp.* Midge-orchid, *Cassinia arcuata* Coffee Bush, *Xerochrysum viscosum* Sticky Everlasting, *Astroloma humifusum* Cranberry Heath, *Eucalyptus tricarpa* Red Ironbark. Garry showed us two specimens of *Thysanotus patersonii* Twining Fringe-lily (not flowering). One plant was last season's and was brown; the other was green and next season's. He said that it was helpful when doing a flora assessment to be able to recognize plants when they are not flowering, but are in ascendancy or decline.

Overall the area is classified as Box Ironbark Forest, but Garry told us that there are other ecological vegetation classes (EVC's) within the Box Ironbark Forest. The changes in the landscape and the vegetation are subtle. The other EVC's we were shown were Heathy Dry Forest and Alluvial Terraces Herb Rich Woodland.

Following afternoon tea we moved on to a more rugged area known simply as "The Gorge". The more adventurous ones climbed the rocky hillside, whilst the wiser ones rested in the car.

Bird list for Paddys Range – Noel Young

Although Garry said that numbers were down, there seemed to be quite a lot of bird activity in the area. Immediately noticeable were a considerable number of Dusky Woodswallows wheeling around overhead. Garry thought that there may be White browed amongst them, though when they later came down into the trees I saw only Duskies. Other interesting sightings during the afternoon were Black chinned Honeyeaters and a solitary male Crested Bellbird making a harsh "ratchet" call; much easier to track down than the usual vetriloquial notes. In one area there were

numerous round "scrapes" about the size of a dinner plate, revealing the activity of Button-quail.

List of species for the bushland

Red Wattlebird	Black faced Cuckoo-shrike
Dusky Woodswallow	Grey Shrike Thrush
Black chinned Honeyeater	Yellow tufted Honeyeater
Spotted Pardalote	Striated Pardalote
Peaceful Dove	Common Bronzewing Pigeon
Eastern Rosella	Aust. Raven
Crested Bellbird	

Observations

- A pair of Scarlet Robins, and 4 Speckled Warblers chased off by White naped Honeyeaters – Denis Hurley
- On the highway near Taradale, a Wedge-tailed Eagle swooped across to perch low in a tree - George Broadway
- Bottlebrush and Ti-tree are now 'ripe' for seed collecting – Natasha Harris
- Natasha also described her encounter with a Red bellied Black snake while walking her three dogs. She ordered them to freeze while the snake progressed, passing through the legs of one of them. A well disciplined dog!
- A pair of white faced Herons flew over the house at Sunshine, and Parsons Bands seen at Belltopper Hill (north Drummond) and the Bacon Factory – Richard Piesse
- A couple of Parsons Bands at our bush block – Natalie de Maccus
- Swift Parrots were seen at the golf course, but seem to have moved on. Large numbers of Kangaroos however, remain - Hans van Gemert
- A White - fronted Honeyeater seen and photographed for 3 or 4 days at Muckleford – Alison Rowe

From the April business meeting

Nigel Harland has passed on an offer from the organiser of his trip to **Christmas Island** (see his article last issue) for participants in another one on either of the following dates: (prices ex Perth, accom + air fares)

2008 Nov 24 – Dec 5 (11 days)	$3300
2009 mid February (7days)	$2600

More details will be available at the next club meeting

Vic Veg Online – Geraldine Harris

Victorian Best Practice Native Vegetation Management.

Ian Higgins recently gave a demonstration of an important website he has been developing with NCCMA at the Bendigo Native Plant Group. He began by suggesting that if we are to combat the global problem of loss of biodiversity there should be prizes for untidy towns that would provide more habitat for threatened native species, both flora and fauna. To restore populations of threatened species, there is an urgent need to teach people about indigenous plant species so that they can learn to value and look after habitat that already exists and successfully plant more. Indigenous species that are native to a particular locality have a better rate of survival and regeneration rate, and they need the least time and energy to keep going.

Much has been learned from mistakes made in revegetation efforts in the past and we now know that the use of local species, in the right locations, at the right time, with the correct preparation, is important. To this end Ian has been working on a prototype of a North Central Catchment Management Authority website project that will make this information accessible to anyone who wants to learn more about native plants and plant scapes. Originally developed for this region alone, it is now being extended to cover all state regions.

Ian guided us through some of the information that is available starting with -

1. Website http://nvbmp.nccma.vic.gov.au/
2. Choose a region
3. Navigational Aid, Choose Plant Species; Plant Scapes; Tools and Techniques

With this website you can learn –

- How to identify Environmental Vegetation Classes, their value, how much remains, where they occur, etc, etc.
- Information about plant species (and access to DSE photo gallery).
- Get plant lists for your area with ratings to suggest ease of growth and propagation information.
- Information on protection, repairing and revegetation methods and much more.

Ian would be grateful for information, corrections and feedback on this site. He would also be very grateful for good photos (accompanied by name of species, name of photographer, date taken, location [nearest town or postcode, and garden or provenance if you know it]). Ian Higgin's email address is ian.higgins@nccma.vic.gov.au

LOOKING FOR WILDFLOWERS – Dorothy Bessant

Looking for wildflowers
I could find them on my Field Nats CD
Or come spring take the road past my house
go through the gap in the barbed-wire fence
be among gums and ghosts good lord
look on the graves below.
Graves of diggers graves of dear ones
graves of babies never held
all in death as in life divided.
I'd see the burning tower remember the miners
the eight hundred miners from China
buried so far from their home.
I'd ponder the fate of the first ones uncounted
Then I'd turn to the fence-line
see the horse farm
with its bare dusty paddocks its
horses kicking up their heels.
Further along would be
rusting out machinery
and in the gully below
car wrecks, one, two, three
But I would turn away
to the bushes innermost recesses
up on the ridge-line, away from the fence line
and down the other side.

There I'd find it, the miracle
floating across the earth, that hard dry earth
from which it would seem
no flower could ever spring. There they'd be though
in delicate profusion, pink, white and purple,
vivid yellow, palest mauve, blue, a touch of red
with names like wax-lip, gorse bitter-pea, shiny everlasting
five-petalled hibbertia, yellow wiry buttons, chocolate lily.
I'd stand and savour them, knowing that
in a month of Sundays, they'd not come again,
not this year. The bush would close ranks
buckle down against a long hot summer. Snakes would
slither through the drying grass, the leaves
of eucalypt and native cherry would be still, or move
in the wind. God forbid there'd be fire.
Even so, the bush and its flowers
would make a come-back
wouldn't they
one day?

Diamond Gully structure plan - Natalie de Maccus

On 23rd November 2007 I attended a meeting called by the Mount Alexander Shire Council to discuss various aspects of the Diamond Gully Structure Plan. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Department of Sustainability and Environment, staff of Mount Alexander Shire Council, Friends of the Box Ironbark Forest, Biosis (the research group engaged by Council), Mackenzie's Hill Landcare and Action Group and Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club. The main subject for discussion was the ecological assessment to be undertaken by Biosis.

The Diamond Gully refers to the area roughly bounded by the Pyrenees Highway, Willy Milly Road, Ranter's Gully Road and Martin Street. It comprises approximately 182 hectares and is located about three kilometres south-west of Castlemaine town centre. This area has been identified by Council as the principle growth area around Castlemaine for residential development.

Council sees development of the structure plan as providing the opportunity to create a high quality, environmentally sensitive and sustainable residential development. Production of the structure plan was to take approximately 12 months, with "...exhibition of a planning scheme amendment being the mark of completion."

Included in its aims for innovative and sustainable development are utilization of storm-water on the site, maximizing solar access by careful siting of streets and residential blocks, sub-division lay-out that considers land-form and environmental characteristics, increase in residential density by provision of some small blocks to protect environmentally significant areas, protection of native vegetation and creation of wildlife corridors to and from public forests and vegetated areas. To assist Council in their aims CFNC supplied Biosis with copies of our plant and bird lists. Debbie Worland kindly supplied Biosis with her records of bird sightings 2000-2007. These lists were to supplement the Victorian Flora Database plant list, the Atlas of Victoria Wildlife and Birds Australia Database lists obtained by Biosis. In their final report Biosis also referred to three additional plant studies undertaken by Cheers & Cheers 2004, Cheers & Cheers 2006 and Trust for Nature 2003.

On Tuesday 8th April another meeting of the reference group was held at the Town Hall to discuss results of the assessment conducted by Biosis. Although Biosis had produced a comprehensive report some participants at this meeting expressed concern at some of the findings and recommendations. The ecological assessment was conducted on 28th and 29th November 2007. This seemed rather late in the wildflower season to maximize the plant count. The report did not indicate whether a night search was conducted to establish the presence or absence of nocturnal birds or mammals. Also the report did not indicate the approximate number of residential sites to be made available, nor did it recommend a minimum size for individual sites.

STOP PRESS. In *Castlemaine Mail* dated Friday April 18th it was reported that "He (Mount Alexander Shire CEO Adrian Robb) cited the Diamond Gully Structure Plan, which envisages the potential for 400 lots, but said it may be some time before it is fully realised."

A Trip to the Canyonlands – Noel Young

If you didnt make it to the April club meeting, you missed a real treat. Carol Halls' presentation of the 'Canyons of the Colorado Plateau' was a rare combination of education and eye-candy. Her excellent photography of this very photogenic subject was matched by a lucid explanation of its origins in geology and physiography. Apart from being visually spectacular the Colorado Plateau is of course renowned as one of the worlds classic geological features, largely because the depth and breadth of the Grand Canyon lays open a substantial cross section through time in the form of near horizontal sedimentary layers unencumbered with vegetation. As the layers are gently inclined, the journey we were taken on revealed a vast time sequence from the oldest in the bottom of the Grand Canyon to the youngest in the walls of Bryce Canyon.

It is hard to get to grips with the sheer enormity of the scale in both space and time. The Grand Canyon itself is 277 miles long with a width of up to 18 miles and a mile of maximum depth. The gorge is cut so deep that it scratches the surface of ancient basement rocks – metamorphosed volcanics which are now gneisses and schists of the Vishnu formation, 1.8 billion years old; nearly half as old as the planet. They are seen now as dark crumpled rocks shot through with veins of injected pink granite.
There is then a huge hiatus in time after which the GC supergroup is evident in places. These were sediments and lava flows deposited 1.2 billion years ago in rift valleys formed when crustal plates pull away from each other, and are better represented by the 'basin and range' province in Nevada. In contrast to the Vishnu, the beds are tilted, but are otherwise unaltered despite their age.

An unconformity again occurs to the overlying long sequence of Palaeozoic and Mesozoic sediments which form the bulk of the visible strata in the Grand Canyon walls – the layer-cake of colorful bands virtually free of any vegetation.

Because we are looking at a huge area, any attempt to detail the geology is fraught with difficulties owing to variations from place to place, but an almost continuous sequence is represented from early Cambrian (500mya) to the Tertiary as horizontal layers of sediments laid down in a shallow marine environment close to an older North American continent. A prominent feature of the Grand Canyon is the [Carboniferous] Redwall limestone. Limestone is basically white, but the deep red colour is derived from the leaching of iron oxides from the Supai formation above.

The spectacular physiography of the Colorado Plateau has evolved rapidly and very recently in geological terms. At the end of the Mesozoic (dinosaur era) some 70 mya, the Rocky Mountains began to form as the North American plate subducted the Pacific plate. The Colorado Plateau formed as this area was pushed up steadily from sea level to elevations of thousands of feet. This occurred with remarkably little disruption of the strata. By 5 or 6 mya the Colorado River flowed across the Plateau and began to disect it. More rapid headward erosion following ice age cycles no doubt assisted in carving out the spectacular gorges we see today.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
May 2008

Fri May 9 meeting: Sid Cowling on wetlands conservation.
Sat May 10. Field trip: Railway Dam (Tunnel Hill) **and Crocodile Reservoir** (Fryerstown). **Leader : Rita Mills.**
May 11. Option to join excursion to Maryborough natural history sites – meet 1.30pm at Maryborough P.O.
17-18 May National Swift Parrot survey: Spotters needed – contact Debbie Worland, 5472 2474
June 8. Option to join Ballarat FNC on their **Fungi excursion to Daylesford or Blackwood** (weather dependent)
June 13. meeting: Mike Weston on wildlife conservation.
June 14. Field trip: Swift parrot walk CM golf course.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.
Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Broadways, 7 Wheeler Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.*

***Please note** for May only, the business. meeting will be held at Natalies – 65 Johnstone st

Subscriptions for 2008
Ordinary membership: Single $27, Family $35
Pensioner or student: Single $24, Family $29
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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